

# Alternative Therapies and Medicines

**H**AVE YOU EVER BEEN to a health store that sells herbal supplements? Have you ever done yoga? If you have, you have seen examples of alternative medicine. While many examples of alternative medicine may be beneficial, others may not be. In fact, some may be harmful. Scientists have studied the effects of many alternative therapies, but not all therapies have scientific support. In this unit, you will learn more about some commonly used complementary and alternative medicines.



## Objective:



Describe alternative therapies and medicines.

## Key Terms:



alternative medicine  
Ayurvedic medicine  
CAM  
complementary medicine

homeopathic medicine  
integrated medicine  
integrative medicine  
manipulative practices  
mind-body medicine

NCCAM  
osteopathic medicine  
whole medicine

## Understanding Alternative Therapies and Medicines

People were treating illnesses long before there were doctors, as we know them today. While doctors may recommend surgery or prescribe medication to treat a problem, many people choose to treat illnesses with alternative therapies and medicines. In some cases, they

choose a treatment that is used in conjunction with traditional therapy, while others use alternatives instead of traditional methods.

## COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINES

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CAM is an accepted abbreviation for “complementary and alternative medicines.” The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the National Institutes of Health (**NCCAM**) is the federal government’s lead agency for scientific research on CAM. According to NCCAM, **CAM** is a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that generally are not considered part of conventional medicine. Some scientific evidence supports CAM therapies, but questions remain about safety and intended purposes.

### *Complementary Medicine*

**Complementary medicine** is a collection of practices and methods of treatment used with conventional medicine. For example, a patient may use aromatherapy to reduce pain after surgery.

### *Alternative Medicine*

**Alternative medicine** is a collection of practices and methods of treatment used in place of conventional medicine. For instance, herbal medicine may be used to treat cancer instead of radiation treatment or surgery recommended by a conventional physician.

### *Integrated Medicine*

**Integrated medicine** or **integrative medicine** is a practice of combining treatments from conventional medicine with CAM therapies for which there is evidence of safety and effectiveness.

## MEDICINES AND THERAPIES

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There are five main categories of CAM, and some overlapping occurs. The categories are whole medicine, mind-body medicine, biologically based practices, manipulative practices, and energy medicines. CAM therapies exist to treat almost any disease or condition. However, the safety and effectiveness of some CAM therapies has not yet been established.

### *Whole Medicine*

**Whole medicine** systems are CAM systems based on theory and practices that have evolved earlier than conventional medicine. **Homeopathic medicine** is a whole body medicine system in which small doses of highly diluted substances that would cause illness in larger doses are given to stimulate the body’s ability to heal itself. Homeopathic medicines include



## DIGGING DEEPER...

### UNCOVERING ADDITIONAL FACTS: Herbal Supplements

While some herbal supplements may be beneficial in treating medical problems, many are ineffective or even harmful. The regulations for herbal supplements are different than those for traditional medications. According to Mayo Clinic's website (<http://www.mayoclinic.com>), supplements do not need FDA approval before hitting the market. However, the FDA does have the authority to pull a product from the market if it finds a supplement to be unsafe. So there is no guarantee that a product is safe. It just means the FDA has not found a problem yet. In some cases, a supplement that is safe for one person may have a dangerous interaction with medication taken by another person. It is important to talk to your doctor before taking any over-the-counter medications or supplements.

Conduct your own research by using the Internet, news sources, and/or information provided by a doctor. Find at least one example of an herbal supplement that was sold to the public and later found to be dangerous. Learn what negative effects the supplement caused and whether the manufacturer faced any consequences. Report your findings to your classmates, and listen to their reports to learn more about herbal supplements.

naturopathic medicine, Chinese medicine (e.g., acupuncture), chiropractic medicine, and osteopathic medicine. It also includes **Ayurvedic medicine**, which is one of the world's oldest medicine systems, originating in India. **Osteopathic medicine** is an approach to healthcare that emphasizes the roll of the musculoskeletal system in health and disease.

### Mind-Body Medicine

**Mind-body medicine** is a treatment type that involves techniques such as meditation, prayer, spiritual healing, art, music, dance, pet therapy, play therapy, and aromatherapy. Other examples are support groups, therapy, hypnosis, imagery, and bio-feedback.

### Biologically Based Practices

Biologically based practices use substances found in nature (e.g., herbs and herbal supplements), foods, dietary supplements, vitamins, and hydrotherapy. Other natural but not yet scientifically proven therapies involve the use of shark cartilage and bee pollen as cancer treatment.



FIGURE 1. Biologically based practices include the use of herbs and herbal supplements.

## Manipulative Practices

**Manipulative practices** are techniques based on movement of one or more parts of the body. Examples are chiropractic and osteopathic therapies, massage therapy, yoga, Tai Chi, acupuncture, and reflexology.

## Energy Medicines

Energy medicines include Reiki, therapeutic touch, Qi gong, magnet therapy, crystal therapy, acupuncture, Tai Chi, electrical therapy, yoga, and light therapy.



**FIGURE 2.** Yoga is considered an example of a manipulative practice and energy medicine.

## Summary:



Complementary and alternative medicines, or CAM, are a group of diverse medical and health care systems, practices, and products that generally are not considered part of conventional medicine. Complementary medicine is a collection of practices and methods of treatment used with conventional medicine. Alternative medicine is a collection of practices and methods of treatment used in place of conventional medicine. Integrated medicine is a practice of combining treatments from conventional medicine with CAM therapies for which there is evidence of safety and effectiveness.

There are five main categories of CAM, and some overlapping occurs. They are whole medicine, mind-body medicine, biologically based practices, manipulative practices, and energy medicines. CAM therapies exist to treat almost any disease or condition. However, the safety and effectiveness of some CAM therapies has not yet been established.

## Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is CAM?
2. What is the difference between complementary and alternative medicine?
3. What are the five categories of CAM?
4. What are some examples of mind-body medicine?
5. What are some examples of manipulative practices?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Interview a friend or family member who has used some form of alternative medicine. Find out which type of CAM he or she chose. Why did he or she choose that particular form of alternative medicine? Was it recommended by a physician or a friend? Ask whether he or she discussed it with a doctor before beginning the treatment. Is the CAM being used in combination with traditional medical treatment? What benefits, if any, has the individual noticed since beginning the treatment?

## Web Links:

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### **Mind-Body Medicine**

<http://www.umm.edu/altmed/articles/mind-body-000355.htm>

### **NCCAM**

<http://nccam.nih.gov/>

### **Acupuncture**

<http://www.acupuncture.com/>